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THE MUSICAL TIMES

AND

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THE PREFACE.

In judging of the relative merits of different modes of instruction, there are two principal considerations which must determine our opinion—the first having reference to the teacher, namely, the ease with which the instruction can be imparted; the second affecting the scholar, namely, the several advantages to be derived from that instruction.

On both these all-important points the preference over other styles of composition may fairly be claimed for Rounds, when systematically taught, as an introduction to the useful and delightful art of part-singing.

No one, who, in instructing children in music, has employed both rounds and harmonized airs, can doubt which style is more easily taught; and, even where there is no experience to guide, reason alone can determine the matter. In teaching a harmonized air, where there is but one instructor, which must be the case in a vast majority of schools, the natural mode of proceeding will be,—first, to teach the scholars the air in unison; this done, a portion of them must be untaught the air, before they can be made to sing the second part; and, again, another portion must be untaught the air, and as much of the second as they may have picked up by hearing that part taught, before they can be instructed in the third harmony; and, should there be a fourth part, there must be another process of unteaching and teaching.

Now compare these series of tedious operations with the natural method of teaching a round. First, all are taught the piece in unison; then, having first accustomed the scholars' ears to the harmony by singing the other parts while they continue to sing together, the teacher takes a portion of the class and sings the second part with them; and, as they gain confidence, he gradually leaves them to sing by themselves. The same operation is repeated for the remaining parts. Should any division be unable to sing their part, they can be joined to another division until more perfect, and may then be started afresh by themselves. In this case there is nothing to unteach, and nothing to teach but what is taught at first in unison.

Equally with harmonized airs do rounds teach the peculiar character and phraseology of different harmonies, but with this advantage on the side of the latter, that *all* the scholars are taught to sing *each* part. But there is one excellence which especially attaches to rounds, and that most important indeed. It is almost impossible to sing a round, except of the most simple construction, without observing strict time. In a harmonized air or a psalm tune, the words being the same in each part and the notes corresponding, there may be a sort of mutual consent to sing with an utter disregard to all time and measure. But in a round, in consequence of the words being different, and there being no correspondence in the length of the notes in the different parts, this most injurious compact becomes impossible; and if attempted, the round must soon come to a close in discord and chaos. The result is that the singers are driven to sing *independently*, and are compelled, instead of waiting on their neighbour, to look for assistance in themselves, and this assistance they find supplied by the natural sense of time that lies within them. If children can but be made to employ that feeling of rhythm with which nature has endowed them, the first great step is made towards making them musicians; and there is no fear of their relapsing into that drawling, pointless, drowsy mode of singing, that has done so much towards bringing into disrepute our fine old congregational psalmody.

The chief ground for hoping that the following small collection of rounds may be found useful as an elementary book of musical instruction, is, that the majority of the pieces it contains *have been* found useful in this capacity. With the addition of a few of the more intricate compositions, it is a collection that has been used with success in a country village school.

The rounds are arranged according to their relative difficulty. It is hoped that by this arrangement, trouble in selection may be saved the teacher, as well as discouragement to the scholars. Nothing is more injurious in musical instruction than an attempt to take too rapid strides. If children be taken out of their depth, they lose all heart and interest in the matter, and an unwilling scholar was never yet taught to sing.

Where the original words have been considered unfit for school instruction, they have been changed for others that it is hoped will be considered less objectionable. The fact of the original words being innocently humorous, has not been deemed sufficient reason for altering them. The round will not be learnt the more slowly because the first reading of the words may have caused a merry smile to pass round the class. The less the singing practice wears the rigid and forbidding aspect of a lesson, the more rapid and satisfactory will be the improvement—the more probable will it be that the child will grow into the man, who can help to render the thanksgiving of his Parish Church a decent and fitting sacrifice of Praise, and who shall be able to employ those spare hours that otherwise might perhaps be worse than wasted in idle gossip at the ale-house, in the rational and delightful amusement of glee-singing.

J. P. M.